

ADMIRAL CHARLES K. DUNCAN, U. S. NAVY (RET.)

Former: Supreme Allied Commander Atlantic
Commander in Chief Atlantic
Commander in Chief, U. S. Atlantic Fleet

Admiral Charles Kenney Duncan, U. S. Navy, became NATO's seventh Supreme Allied Commander Atlantic on September 30, 1970. At the same time he became Commander in Chief Atlantic (the United States Unified Command) and the Commander in Chief of the U. S. Atlantic Fleet. He retired from the U. S. Navy on November 1, 1972, in the grade of Admiral.

Admiral Duncan was Deputy Chief of Naval Operations (Manpower and Naval Reserve) and the Chief of Naval Personnel from April, 1968, to August, 1970. The Distinguished Service Medal was awarded to him for "exceptionally meritorious service" during that period. With the medal he received a citation that praised his "dynamic leadership and outstanding foresight," "his deep concern for the morale and welfare of Navy personnel," and "his dedicated service and brilliant record for achievement."

Previous to the assignment as Chief of Naval Personnel, Admiral Duncan had held a sequence of three major Atlantic Fleet Commands: the U. S. Second Fleet and NATO's Striking Fleet Atlantic (1967-68); the Atlantic Fleet Amphibious Force (promoted to Vice Admiral) (1965-67), and the Atlantic Fleet Cruiser-Destroyer Force (1964-65). For his service as Commander Amphibious Force, he was awarded the Legion of Merit with a citation that commended "his outstanding operational and planning ability, leadership and sound judgment."

Admiral Duncan had had earlier experience at both the Supreme Allied Commander Atlantic and Commander in Chief Atlantic/Atlantic Fleet Headquarters. He was a member of the Plans and Policy section of the Supreme Allied Commander Atlantic Staff the first year of that Command's activation (1952-53), and was Assistant Plans Officer on the Commander in Chief Atlantic/Atlantic Fleet (1948-51).

Three tours of duty in the Bureau of Personnel in Washington had preceded his tour as Chief of Naval Personnel. He was Assistant Chief of Naval Personnel for Plans and Programs (1962-64); Executive Assistant to the Chief of Naval Personnel (1953-55), and Director of Officer Procurement, Bureau of Naval Personnel (1944-46). More than

100,000 naval officers were commissioned while he was Director of Officer Procurement. During this latter period he served as a member of the Navy's "Holloway Board" to "Study the Form, System, and Method of Education of Naval Officers." The conclusions and recommendations of this Board established the modern NROTC and provided also for direct commission of college graduates at the Officer Candidate School, among other matters.

Admiral Duncan began his naval career at age 17 as a Naval Academy Midshipman. Upon graduation in 1933 he was commissioned as Ensign, U. S. Navy, and served for five years aboard the cruiser, U.S.S. SALT LAKE CITY in the Pacific. He came to the Atlantic in 1938 to serve in several capacities in the destroyer SCHENCK (DD-159). He continued serving at sea as World War II approached, being assigned to the staff of the Commander Destroyers, Atlantic Fleet, at the time that command was formed in June, 1940. It was during this period, while turning over 50 destroyers to the British, that he met his wife, Sheila Taylor of Halifax, Nova Scotia, whom he married the following summer of 1941 in Bermuda.

He commissioned the destroyer HUTCHINS (DD-476) as Executive Officer in the Atlantic in 1942. After a short period in the Atlantic he went with her to the Pacific, taking part in combat action in the Aleutians and the South Pacific. He then commanded the destroyer WILSON (DD-408), taking part in combat actions in the South, and Central Pacific. For his service as Commanding Officer he was awarded the Navy Commendation medal with Combat "V", and a Gold Star with Combat "V" in lieu of a second award.

His post-World War II duty began as Executive Officer of the fast battleship WISCONSIN in 1946. He then attended the Armed Forces Staff College in Norfolk. In 1951 (after serving 3 years on the Atlantic Fleet Staff) he was assigned as Commander Destroyer Division 62 in the Atlantic. In 1955 (after Bureau of Personnel duty) he was assigned as Commanding Officer of the Amphibious Attack Transport CHILTON in the Atlantic and Mediterranean. The CHILTON won the Amphibious Force's Battle Readiness Plaque during this period.

These tours were followed with a series of assignments in the Pacific. The first was as Assistant Chief of Staff for Operations for the Commander in Chief, Pacific Fleet (1956-58). Selected for

promotion to Rear Admiral in the summer of 1958, he was immediately assigned as Commander Amphibious Group One (1958-59) and later as Commander Amphibious Training Command, Pacific Fleet (1959-61). In January of 1961 he was assigned as Commander, U. S. Naval Base Subic Bay, Philippines. While there, he also became President of a Philippine charitable association and also Vice President of the Philippines Tubercular Association. He became an "adopted son" of the Provinces of Bataan and Zambales. From the Philippines he returned to the Bureau of Personnel in 1962.

Since retirement in November, 1972, Admiral Duncan has lived in the country near Leesburg, Virginia, and become identified with local volunteer work with the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, the Board of "Keep Loudoun Beautiful," and the Boy Scouts. He is a member of the Board of Managers of the Navy Relief Society in Washington and a member of the Secretary of the Navy's Advisory Board on Education and Training. He is a member of the Board of Advisors to the President, U. S. Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island.

In the Spring of 1974 Admiral Duncan was installed in Athens as Honorary President of the "Greek National Organization Encouraging NATO's Aims."

As Supreme Allied Commander, Atlantic, in which Command he held the largest NATO naval exercises ever held, he received the Award of the Grand Cross of the Order of Oranje Nassau with Swords from Her Majesty the Queen of the Netherlands, and the Grand Cross of the Order of AVIS (the oldest military order) from Portugal. Admiral Duncan, as Supreme Allied Commander Atlanti was given an audience with His Majesty the King of Belgium, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, Queen of Britain, His Majesty the King of Denmark, and His Majesty the King of Norway.

Admiral Duncan was born in Nicholasville, Kentucky, on December 7, 1911. He moved to Lexington, Kentucky, at age 9 and subsequently attended Lexington High School, Kavanaugh Preparatory School, and the University of Kentucky. His mother was a full Professor and a Head of Department at the University, one of the first women to hold such position. Admiral Duncan is also a Kentucky "Colonel." Member of the Chevy Chase Club. He is an Episcopalian.

~~Admiral Duncan's current home address (January, 1976) is Route 1, Box 160, Waterford, Virginia 22190. His telephone is (703) 882-3666. Admiral Duncan and his wife, Sheila, will move to Coronado, California, during the coming year.~~

now live in

...having mentioned about Mr. Korth and the reserves really
...to say something about the Cuban crisis. Naturally,
...acted the bureau in several ways. It was a rather un-
...table thing, I guess, to the whole country and certainly
... In the first place, they started treating the Bureau
... we were a Commander in Chief. I especially, having been
... operations officer, knew very well that we were mostly
... staff. We were not operators.

...he had been alerted to do a lot of things and not to let
... know in advance, including the calling-up of certain
... units.

...how far in advance of the actual crisis itself were you
...olved in it?

Ans. D.: My memory fails me, especially on the reserves bit.
...tell you, I think quite accurately, an illustration
...that shows you the way this situation was approached and how
...difficult it was for us in certain ways.

...You may remember that the President was going to come
...television one night and make a speech, and no one was
...allowed to leave the Pentagon or the government office until
...the President's speech was completed.

...This was the announcement of the quarantine?

Adm. D.: That's right.

It was just, I think, within a day or two before that we were warned this was coming. We were warned very secretly, nothing was to be written, all by word of mouth. Admiral Anderson came back from a conference and said that BuPers had been ordered to make plans to evacuate all the dependents from Guantanamo, but not to tell anybody about it. Well, first, they were talking to the wrong people, but that didn't matter, we had been told to do it. The State Department is in general charge of evacuation from foreign countries, the Navy assisting. This was almost wholly a Navy operation. The Commander in Chief of the Atlantic Fleet was the responsible action officer. We were not allowed to tell the Commander in Chief of the Atlantic Fleet of certain personnel plans. The CNO, I am sure, did give him plenty of orders and complete information on the operational side. Admiral Anderson never understood the personnel situation very well, he was too engrossed with other matters. I think the orders on personnel came from the political side and in the military you usually salute and carry them out, if you can.

Q: Wasn't this one of the very first instances where direct commands came to the military from the White House itself?

Adm. D.: In my experience, yes. Perhaps it's happened many times.

It has since.

Adm. D.: It has since, yes. It was one of the first times that we were really responding to details the highest echelon directed. I'm sure it was a Presidential order. Also, it was a very difficult order and it occurred rather late at night, as I recall, two nights before he spoke. Admiral Smedberg sent for me and said we had been instructed to do this. I explained to him, because I was very familiar with it, that it was the Commander in Chief's responsibility, and he explained to me, and I understood, that this was an order, that the Bureau of Naval Personnel was to do this.

Fortunately, having been in the fleet so much, I was quite familiar with the whole situation and I knew the evacuation plans and I told Admiral Smedberg that I had to inform certain people who would carry out the action. I had to know what ships were there. I had to have a place to receive the women and children. I don't remember the number now but it seems to me it was 1,800 - it doesn't matter. But it was wintertime or late fall, especially hard for them coming from the tropics. I forget the exact season of the year.

Q: It was actually late October.

Adm. D.: Yes, and it was comparatively cold in Norfolk. We had to do a job that I'm sure must have ruffled some feelings

in the Fleet and at Com5th Naval District, and I tried to explain this. We did go ahead and execute orders and select an evacuation site, et cetera. I personally called the Amphibious Base, Norfolk. As I told Admiral Smedberg, I was extremely familiar with the Atlantic and I told him that was the best place because I knew they had empty barracks for summer training and that they were equipped to do a lot -

Q. How many people did you have to bring in on this?

A. D.: Very, very few, and I had to say things that sounded a little silly like "Get ready, but don't tell anybody." It's awfully hard to get ready and not tell anybody! I talked to the Commandant, who had certain responsibilities, actually I talked to his Chief of Staff, who was a very close friend of mine. I talked to Jack Dempsey, the Commander Amphibious Training Commander, who was in charge of the Amphibious Base. I had to ask him not to tell his boss. I'm confident he did tell his boss.

Q. I bring this out as an interesting aspect of that particular Kennedy-McNamara era when some very unusual things went on in the way of civilian orders almost direct to operational units. Later in this particular game orders went direct to operational units. I'm sure you've talked to Admiral George Anderson about the McNamara relationship.

Oh, yes.

Adm. D.: We made what arrangements we could. BuPers did not have to do too much due to the fact that everybody responds to a real emergency. Of course, as soon as the President's speech was on the air everyone knew. I'm sorry to say, my memory fails me as to the exact time relationship between our evacuation and the President's speech, but obviously we could not have evacuated them, I think, before the President's speech without starting a sort of panic in the public. In any event, through telephone calls from an agency whose responsibility it was not, the Chief of Personnel, we did line up the evacuation of Guantanamo. Once it was on, of course, it was the Commander in Chief's responsibility and the Fleet did the work. The Amphibious Force did the work - and incidentally did a superb job - of getting blankets, clothing, et cetera and they did a superb job of receiving all of these dependents.

Q: And they were deposited in Norfolk?

Adm. D.: Yes. This was a quick reaction to a political-military situation, and a lot of this was political. While the Commander in Chief, Atlantic, was in a better position to know than we, we from our knowledge were not too concerned that anybody was going to attack Guantanamo. If they were

going to do that sort of thing, it would not be just Guantanamo. Guantanamo itself would be relatively unimportant once attacked, because everyone knew what that would trigger. Our main concern, frankly, was taking care of these ladies and their children. Fortunately they all had evacuation drills down there and had gone several times to their embarkation posts, and we had the list of ships available, aircraft available, and all that sort of thing.

Q: There was a general knowledge in the Navy of what was going on, wasn't there? Because there had been some publicity of the build-up?

Adm. D.: Yes, and speculation.

Q: Besides there was a voice in the Senate almost daily talking about it. He was discounted but he nevertheless talked about it.

Adm. D.: Yes, and I'm sure Smedberg knew a lot more than I did, and, of course, the CNO was completely cut in.

It was during the action phase that the White House and SecDef civilians started giving orders direct to various echelons. Now I'm getting out of my own field, but there were people calling and saying "This is the White House." Of course, this is an old tactic. I remember receiving many,

many hundreds of these in the Bureau. But to give action orders by saying "This is the White House" was new to us. Fortunately certain Navy officers would query it and say "Who is this speaking?" and try to pin them down. But in times of crisis like that with a strong and active President, his assistants get awfully busy indeed and start giving orders. This is a very dangerous thing but that happened to be an incident that turned out all right. I'm sure George Anderson has fully described Mr. McNamara coming into the operation's plot and moving ships around.

I wish to mention here a situation in the evacuation which is rather typical of situations encountered by our people. It concerns comparative treatment of civil servants and the military. The press and Congress are fond of saying the military gets all the fringe benefits. In fact, I could give many examples of fringe benefits civil service has far better than the military, along with being generally a nine to five organization, and free to work where they wish. Usually the military gains by "pruning" them. I have cited the civil service extra pay and free housing in such "hardship" posts as Guam and the Philippines. Without going into an involved discussion, the Civil Service retirement plan is more generous than the militarys. They do not have to pay social security tax, which approximates the very modest amount civil service pays into their retirement. And civil servants may stay on (no up or out system) and get 80% of total pay as retired pay. There is no comparable position in the military. The